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ABSTRACT

For people who work in high stress occupations the effects of certain stressful situations can take their toll not only on workers' performance at work and their psychological well being, but also on their family life. This study explored the relationships between job stress, psychological distress, occupational and family outcomes, and coping at work and at home, and attempted to improve on a method of coping scale development first proposed by Latack (1986). Stressors were categorized in this study as job ambiguity, job conflict, and job overload. Subjects were workers (N=129) and their spouses and cohabitants (N=40). High job stress was related to and predictive of poor organizational, psychological, and family outcomes. Coping at work was related to increased occupational self-esteem and job satisfaction. Coping at home with the stress encountered at work was related to increased psychological distress. The families of the workers perceived themselves as having only positive effects on the worker, and perceived the job as having only negative effects on family life; the worker generally saw the job as having primarily positive effects on the family. The Latack coping scales and other measures were judged to have performed reliably. A longitudinal design with a more heterogeneous sample is suggested for future research in this area. (Author/ABL)

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STRESS AND COPING AT WORK AND AT HOME: THE SPILLOVER ISSUE

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Presented at the American Psychological Association's 97th Annual Convention, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1989.

ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationships between job stress, psychological distress, occupational and family outcomes, coping at work and at home and attempted to improve on a method of coping scale development first proposed by Latack (1986). Subjects were 129 workers and 40 spouse or cohabitants. High job stress was related to and predictive of poor organizational, psychological and family outcomes. Coping at work was related to increased occupational self esteem and job satisfaction. Coping at home with the stress encountered at work was related to increased psychological distress. The families of the workers perceived themselves as having only positive effects on the worker, and perceived the job as having only negative effects on family life, whereas, in general, the worker saw the job as having primarily positive effects on the family.

INTRODUCTION

For people who work in high stress occupations the effects of certain stressful situations can take toll not only on the worker's performance at work and his/her psychological well being, but also on family life. This study explored the relationships between perceived aspects of job stressors, psychological distress, occupational outcomes, family outcomes and the types of coping used to manage job stress, both at work and at home. This study also attempted to replicate and improve on a method of coping scale development used by Latack (1986). Stressors were categorized in this study, according to Kahn's (1964) classification scheme, as job ambiguity, job conflict and job overload. Aspects of job stressors that were measured included perceived frequency of occurrence, perceived stress and perceived control over the occurrence of the stressor. Occupational outcomes in this study were job satisfaction, occupational self esteem and the propensity to leave the job. Coping in this study was divided into three types, escape, control (while at work and at home) and symptom management (while at home). Data from the worker's spouse/cohabitant was obtained as a measure of concordance between the worker's report of how he or she coped with the symptoms caused by job stress in the context of the family. Lastly, family outcomes were the effects of job on the quality of family life in general, parent-child relations, and spouse relations.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects in this study were 129 civil service employees working in the Child Protective Services in Upstate New York. The sample consisted of 38 males and 91 females. The mean age of the sample was 33.6 with a standard deviation of 8.4. The majority of the sample was White (91.5%) and the range of time on the job was from 1 to 10 years.

Procedures

The collection of data was done in a training room setting. Subjects were presented with a questionnaire, developed after two pilot studies, designed to measure their perceptions in regards to three categories of job stress: job ambiguity, job conflict and job overload, as well as personal and organizational outcomes. Subjects were directed to read 3 scenarios that depicted instances on their job of one particular category of job stress and were then asked to report how stressful it was for them when it occurred (perceived stress) and the extent to which they felt that they could control the source of stress (perceived control). Subjects were allowed to take as much time as needed to complete the survey. All questionnaires were anonymous.

RESULTS

It was hypothesized that job stress due to ambiguity, conflict and overload would relate and be predictive of certain types of coping on the job and certain occupational and family outcomes.

The results indicated that: (1) job stress was related to increased psychological distress and occupational self esteem and decreased job satisfaction; (2) high levels of stress from conflict situations and overload situations were predictive of high levels of psychological distress; (3) high levels of stress from overload situations were predictive of low levels of job satisfaction; (4) the performance of control coping in response to ambiguous situations was related to increased occupational self esteem, the performance of control coping in response to overload situations was related to increased occupational self esteem and job satisfaction and the performance of symptom management coping at home was related to increased psychological distress; (5) the use of control coping at work in response to job overload was predictive of high occupational self esteem and the use of symptom management coping at home was predictive of high levels of psychological distress; (6) high job stress was related to increased perceptions of the negative effects of the family on the job, high job stress was related to decreased perceptions of the positive effects of the job on the family, high perceived control over the work environment was related to increased perceptions of positive effects of the job on the children, the performance of control coping at work was related to increased perceptions of the negative effects of the job on the children and the performance of escape coping at work was related to decreased

perceptions of positive effects of the job on the children and (7) perceived negative effects of the family on the job was related to increased psychological distress, perceived positive effects of the family on the job was related to increased job satisfaction, perceived negative effects of the job on the family was related to decreased job satisfaction and increased psychological distress and perceived negative effects of the job on children was related to increased psychological distress.

For those workers who were married or cohabitating this study attempted to measure concordance between the worker's report of the ways in which he/she coped with job stress at home and perceived issues concerning the spillover of stress between job and family by obtaining the same information from the worker's spouse or cohabitant. The worker reports and spouse/cohabitant reports were highly discrepant regarding issues of spillover. For example, in general, the family perceived themselves as having only positive effects on the worker, and perceived the job as having only negative effects on family life, whereas, in general, the worker saw the job as having primarily positive effects on the family. Some concordance was reached in terms of how both groups viewed the use of home- based coping strategies by the workers.

The coping scales and other measures performed reliably and a longitudinal design with a more heterogeneous sample was suggested for further research in this area. This study yields major contributions to the study of occupational stress in the human services and the family issues that also come into play when stress is transported between the work and family systems.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Certain types of stress were related to and predictive of certain types of outcomes. Stress did not have a universally negative effect. In the majority of cases, certain types of stress were not related to nor predictive of certain types of coping.
2. The method of coping scale development proposed by Latack (1986) yielded reliable measures of coping.
3. Spouses/cohabitants shared similar perceptions with the worker in regards to the types of overt coping that was done at home, by the worker to deal with job stress.
4. Escape was the predominant type of coping used at home to cope with job stress and control was the predominant type of coping used at work.
5. Spillover existed in this sample in the form of the family perceiving that the worker's job had mostly negative effects on family life and the worker perceiving that his or her job had mostly positive effects on the family.

Table 1.

Psychometric Evaluation of Worker Stress Scales

Scale	Scale Mean	SD	Standardized Item Alpha
Perceived Frequency of Job Stress	6.54	3.24	.73
Perceived Stress	8.61	3.28	64
Perceived Control	2.72	3.31	74

Table 2.

Psychometric Evaluation of Coping at Work Scales

Scale	Scale Mean	SD	Standardized Item Alpha
Job Ambiguity Control	3.5	0.5	.88 (.79)*
Job Ambiguity Escape	2.8	0.5	.81 (.70)
Job Conflict Control	3.4	0.5	.78 (.85)
Job Conflict Escape	2.9	0.6	.74 (.71)
Job Overload Control	3.4	0.5	.80 (.85)
Job Overload Escape	2.9	0.5	.65 (.54)
Escape Coping Across Situations	2.9	0.5	.87
Control Coping Across Situations	3.4	0.5	.88

*Latack (1986)

Table 3.

Psychometric Evaluation of Coping at Home Scales

Scale	Scale Mean	SD	Standardized Item Alpha
Symptom Management	3.2	0.8	60
Control Coping	2.8	0.9	73
Escape Coping	3.2	0.8	74
Social Support Seeking	2.9	0.7	64

Table 4.

Psychometric Evaluation of Worker Outcome Scales

Scale	Scale Mean	SD	Standardized Item Alpha
Occupational Self Esteem	11.98	3.42	.77
Propensity to Leave	1.35	2.85	.71
Job Satisfaction	4.40	2.11	.67
Psychological Distress (HSCL-58)	120.58	167.08	.99

Table 5.

Psychometric Evaluation of Coping at Home Scales
Spouse/Cohabitant Versions

Scale	Scale Mean	SD	Standardized Item Alpha
Symptom Management	36.2 (39.5)*	8.6 (7.2)	.65 (.60)
Control Coping	6.10 (6.11)	2.03 (2.22)	.79 (.73)
Escape Coping	9.8 (15.78)	2.8 (4.07)	.57 (.74)
Social Support Seeking	12.2 (20.6)	3.7 (4.9)	.56 (.64)

*Worker reports from Table 3

Table 6.
Zero-order correlations between the amount of job stress and perceived stress

	Job ambiguity stress	Job Conflict stress	Job Overload stress	Job Stress in general
1) Frequency of job ambiguity	.27***	.15	.21*	.27***
2) Frequency of job conflict	.06	.45***	.12	.26**
3) Frequency of job overload	.22**	.26**	.39***	.37***
4) Frequency of job stress across all situations	.23**	.36***	.31***	.38***

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 7.
Predicting Type of Coping from Perceived Stress
Controlling for the Frequency of Stressor

Type of Perceived Stress		Escape at Work	Control at Work	Escape at Home	Control at Home	Symptom Manag	Social Suppt
Ambiguity	*r*	14*	01	07	-15	-01	-07
	Beta	-03	-12	-11	-20	-04	-06
	b_x	-19	-85	-41	-44	-25	-26
Conflict	*r*	05	-17*	03	-02	-01	-02
	Beta	03	-10	-17	-5	-10	-2
	b_x	26	-95	-72	-36	-77	-63
Overload	*r*	00	-04	-01	05	01	0
	Beta	-01	07	-26	02	-01	-05
	b_x	-05	70	-1.07	06	-06	-24

*p< 05 **p< 01 ***p< 001

Table 8.

Zero-order correlations between the frequency of job stress and psychological and occupational outcomes

	Psychological Distress	Propensity to Leave	Occupational Self Esteem	Job Satisfaction
1) Frequency of job ambiguity	14	05	01	-09
2) Frequency of job conflict	15	04	20*	-07
3) Frequency of job overload	25**	01	22*	-04
4) Frequency of job stress across all situations	21*	03	19*	-06

*p< 05 **p< 01 ***p< 001

Table 9.

Zero-order correlations between the amount of perceived job stress and psychological and occupational outcomes

	Psychological Distress	Propensity to Leave	Occupational Self Esteem	Job Satisfaction
1) Amount of perceived stress from job ambiguity	13	15	-02	-13
2) Amount of perceived stress from job conflict	25**	05	18*	-09
3) Amount of perceived stress from job overload	37***	10	-06	-29**
4) Amount of perceived job stress across all situations	32**	09	04	-21*

*p< 05 **p< 01 ***p< 001

Table 10.
Predicting Outcomes from Perceived Stress
Controlling for Frequency of Stressor

	Psychological Distress	Propensity to Leave	Occupational S.E.	Job Satisfaction
Conflict				
r	.25**	-.05	.18*	-.09
Beta	.27*	-.08	.11	-.08
R^2_{Δ}	9.79*	-.3	.4	-.7
Ambiguity				
r	.13	.15	-.02	-.13
Beta	.10	.16	-.04	-.11
R^2_{Δ}	3.49	.15	-.14	-.21
Overload				
r	.37***	.10	-.06	-.29**
Beta	.31**	.14	-.15	-.32**
R^2_{Δ}	11.89**	.14	-.55	-.64**

*p< .05 **p< .01 ***p< .001

Table 11.
Zero-order Correlations between types of coping and Outcomes

Coping	Psychological Distress	Propensity to Leave	Occupational Self esteem	Job satisfaction
Job Ambiguity Control	.08	-.10	.19*	.14
Job Ambiguity Escape	02	09	12	00
Job Conflict Control	03	- 07	14	14
Job Conflict Escape	06	04	11	- 01
Job Overload Control	03	- 10	24**	17*
Job Overload Escape	08	00	09	- 01
Control coping at home	13	03	06	10
Escape coping at home	- 11	- 02	13	10
Symptom Management	27**	- 06	06	05
Social Support Seeking	13	- 09	- 01	01

*p< 05 **p< 01 ***p< 001

Table 12

Predicting Outcomes from Type of Coping at Work

Controlling for Perceived Stress and Perceived Control

	Psychological Distress	Propensity to Leave	Occupational S.E.	Job Satisfaction
Job Ambiguity				
Control Coping				
r	08	-10	19*	14
Beta	09	-06	19	14
Δr^2	40	-01	09	04
Escape Coping				
r	02	09	12	00
Beta	-05	03	09	-03
Δr^2	-28	00	06	01
Job Conflict				
Control Coping				
r	03	-07	14	14
Beta	11	-04	17	11
Δr^2	44	00	07	02
Escape Coping				
r	06	09	11	-01
Beta	06	06	14	01
Δr^2	31	01	07	00
Job Overload				
Control Coping				
r	03	-10	24**	17*
Beta	07	-06	22*	12
Δr^2	28	-01	09*	03
Escape Coping				
r	08	00	09	-01
Beta	07	01	09	-01
Δr^2	39	00	05	00

*p< 05 **p< 01 ***p< 001

Table 13

Predicting Outcomes from Type of Coping at Home
Controlling for Perceived Stress and Perceived Control

	Psychological Distress	Propensity to Leave	Occupational S.E.	Job Satisfaction
Control Coping				
r	.13	.03	.06	.10
Beta	.11	.02	.05	.06
bx	1.70	.01	.07	.05
Escape Coping				
r	-.11	-.02	.13	.10
Beta	-.07	-.03	.19	.11
bx	-1.60	-.01	.18	.06
Symptom Management				
r	.27**	-.06	.06	.06
Beta	.22*	-.09	.16	.10
bx	1.21*	-.01	.09	.03
Social Support Seeking				
r	.13	-.09	-.01	.01
Beta	.13	-.08	.10	.00
bx	.94	-.01	.08	.00

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 14
Zero-order correlations between Worker-Reported spillover items and job stress and coping at work (N=86)

	Control Coping	Escape Coping	Perceived Job Stress	Frequency of stress	Perceived Control
(1) Negative effects of family on job	.02	.02	.13	.24**	.15
(2) Positive effects of family on job	.15	.03	-.11	.06	.15
(3) Negative effects of job on family	-.07	.05	.32***	.15	-.05
(4) Positive effects of job on family	.07	.03	-.19*	.16	.19*
S_N(5) Negative effects on children	.29*	.04	.16	.09	.07
S_N(6) Positive effects on children	.23	-.30*	-.23	.18	.30*
(7) Good at balancing of spillover	.09	.08	-.18*	-.03	.26**

*p< .05 **p< .01 ***p< .001

S(N=35)

Table 15.
Zero-order correlations between Worker-Reported spillover items and Psychological and Occupational outcomes

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)[S]	(6)[S]	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
(1) Negative effects of family on job	—	.01	.29**	.28**	-.05	.08	-.20**	-.02	-.08	.08	.25**
(2) Positive effects of family on job		—	.00	.44***	.18	.60***	.28**	.23**	-.05	-.13	-.17
(3) Negative effects of job on family			—	.00	.45**	-.22	-.30**	-.18*	-.11	.09	.44***
(4) Positive effects of job on family				—	-.19	.68***	.26**	.16	.08	-.12	-.09
[S](5) Negative effects on children					—	-.08	-.15	-.01	.03	-.01	.32*
[S](6) Positive effects on children						—	.37**	-.06	-.22	-.08	-.12
(7) Good at balancing of spillover							—	.22**	.14	-.14	-.44***
(8) Job Satisfaction								—	.30***	-.61***	-.42***
(9) Occupational Self esteem									—	-.21**	-.21**
(10) Propensity to leave										—	.27**
(11) Psychological Distress											—

*p< .05 **p< .01 ***p< .001

S (N=40)

Table 16.
Zero-order correlations between Worker-Reported spillover items and Coping at Home (N=97)

	Escape at Home	Control at Home	Symptom Manag.	Social Support
(1) Negative effects of family on job	-.12	-.14	.00	.04
(2) Positive effects of family on job	-.11	.17*	-.05	-.12
(3) Negative effects of job on family	-.15	.01	.05	.04
(4) Positive effects of job on family	-.02	.09	.07	-.05
S(5) Negative effects on children	-.05	.17	.11	.29*
S(6) Positive effects on children	-.27*	.18	-.21	-.02
(7) Good at balancing of spillover	.14	.13	-.18*	-.07

*p< .05 **p< .01 ***p< .001

S(N=41)

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